

ABSTRACT

This inventory of the significant natural areas, ecological communities, and rare plant and animal species of Caldwell County was funded by the North Carolina Natural Heritage Trust Fund. Of the 100 counties in the state, Caldwell County ranks in the top half in terms of total numbers of rare species and community types within North Carolina. This report provides background information on the county as a whole and descriptions of 33 Significant Natural Heritage Areas (SNHAs), including two aquatic habitats and one large landscape-scale macrosite. The descriptions of SNHAs include information on their significance (National, State, Regional, and County), viability, natural community types, rare species, management needs, and protection status. This report is designed in part to provide guidance for land use decisions by private landowners, conservation and land management agencies, and county government. The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program (NCNHP) supervised the field work conducted during the 2006-2007 growing seasons.

Most of the survey work was conducted in three very different localized regions of the county. The first region is the Blue Ridge Escarpment, covering the northwestern third of the county. It contains some of the best examples of rare natural communities and rare species in the county, with a Nationally Significant cluster of rare species and natural community examples located at Grandfather Mountain, the highest point in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The second region covers the northeastern third of the county. This area is known as the Brushy Mountains, and is called in this inventory the Foothills region. Much of this region has yet to be explored due to a lack of permission to conduct any extensive survey work there, but portions of this region that have been explored have yielded some significant finds, and hint at the potential diversity and unique natural communities that might occur there. The third region is the Piedmont, covering the remaining southern portion of the county. This region has had heavy human impacts since the late 18th century, resulting from numerous agricultural, residential, and timber-based enterprises. These enterprises have decreased the overall biodiversity of this region, but small pockets of biodiversity still do exist, mostly in the form of rare plant sites.